

Governors Island, Barracks  
(Building #550)  
Governors Island  
New York Harbor  
New York City  
New York County  
New York

HABS No. NY-5715-9

HABS  
NY,  
31-Govt,  
9.

PHOTOGRAPHS  
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HABS  
NY,  
31-Govt,  
9-

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GOVERNORS ISLAND, BARRACKS (Building #550)

HABS No. NY-5715-9

Location: The building faces west on Short Avenue. Wheeler Avenue bounds it on the east. Governors Island, New York Harbor, New York, New York County, New York.

Present Owner: United States Coast Guard

Present Occupant: United States Coast Guard

Present Use: Training center

Significance: This building was part of the unified beautification plan for Governors Island drawn up by the architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White in 1928. It was one of the structures proposed in that effort, but was not built until 1940 when funding became available. It was constructed in the same Georgian Revival style and matches Building #330 which flanks Building #400 on the east side.

### PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

#### A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The plans were drawn in 1938 and the building was completed in 1940.
2. Architect: The plans were drawn by the Construction Division of the Office of the Quartermaster General.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The War Department of the United States (the Department of the Army after 1947) owned the building until 1966 when the island was transferred to the United States Coast Guard.
4. Builder: Construction was contracted out by the Quartermaster Corps.

5. Original plans and construction: Copies of the plans dated 1938 are located at Facilities Engineering, Support Center, New York, Governors Island, New York, New York.

The plans show that the building was designed to be a barracks for 375 people. On the the first floor were located offices, a day room, the mess room and the kitchen. On the second and third floors were squad rooms (sleeping quarters), rooms for non-commissioned officers and toilet and shower areas.

The original cost of the structure was listed in the Army Real Property Records as being \$416,670.88.

6. Additions and alterations: By 1947, 60,000 square feet of this structure had been converted to office space.

Before 1962, some of the porches along the east facade were enclosed along one half of the building.

In 1966, the Coast Guard converted the interior space to house classrooms for the Electronics Technician School, the Telephone Technician School, the Radar School and the Loran School.

B. Historical context:

The structure was completed in 1940 from plans drawn in 1938 provided by the Quartermaster Corps based on plans and details submitted for a beautification plan designed for Governors Island by the architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White in 1928.

It was built as a barracks for the First Army and was used as such until 1943 when the First Army moved to its new headquarters in Bristol, England, to ready itself for its role in World War II. This left the Second Service Command headquartered on Governors Island which required less living space for troops but more office space.

Building #550 served as a barracks and office space until 1966 when the Coast Guard converted it into schools with classrooms and office space for instructors.

Part II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This structure is one of a complex of buildings that were built in the Georgian Revival style. It relates to its immediate neighbor Building #400 to the west and provides a match Building #333 which flanks Building #400 on the east.
2. Condition of fabric: The condition of the building is excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The structure is a U-shaped building, 215' x 39' with two wings 39' x 117'. There is a projecting pavilion in the center of the main facade.
2. Foundations: The foundation is of reinforced concrete.
3. Walls: The walls are built of brick bonded to structural clay tile at every sixth row (common bond, 1 header row to five stretcher rows). Between the first and second story is a granite string course. There is also a concrete string course at the eave line. The arcade has granite keystones.
4. Structural systems, framing: The structure is composed of poured reinforced concrete pillars, 1'2" wide, supporting poured reinforced concrete beams. Over this is a poured concrete floor. The roof is supported by steel I-beam king post trusses.
5. Porches: Along the east side of the structure is a brick arcade on the first floor (now partly enclosed) with a two-story porch supported on concrete pillars (enclosed on the south end). Along the inner sides of the wings are projecting covered arcaded brick walkways.

The main entrance porch at the center of the west facade is composed of two round stone columns and two stone pilasters surmounted by an iron balustrade. On the north side is an enclosed square flat-roofed porch supported on paired square granite columns and paired stone pilasters surmounted by an iron balustrade. The porch is enclosed with wood panels and glass lights.

6. Chimneys: There is a central brick chimney in the main building and an interior brick chimney in each of the wings.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main outer door on the west facade is a doubled wood paneled door with six glass lights with a five-light transom above. The door on the north is a doubled wood paneled door. The doors along the east side are both wood paneled with glass lights and metal doors.
- b. Windows: The windows are mainly six-over-six light double-hung sash. The original wooden frames will be replaced with aluminum ones. Those windows located along the first floor of the main west facade and the outer facades of the wings are set in segmental arch frames. The rest of the windows have rectangular frames.

In each gable end there is a semicircular wood-framed window.

Over the entrance to the north is a Palladian window composed of a central twelve-over-twelve light window flanked by six-over-six light, double-hung sash windows on either side. There are applied wood pilasters which support a wood architrave and a wood fanlight above.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof is a slate gable roof with a cross gable in the center of the main facade. The gable ends are stuccoed and contain fanlights.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Metal flashing is at the eave line above the concrete string course. The gable ends have boxed wood cornices.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The floor plans consist of an interior corridor along the main body of the building which opens into a large room or groups of rooms located in the wings. Offices, classrooms and storage areas are located along this central corridor.

2. Stairways: The building has two interior concrete stairways with metal railings.
3. Flooring: The original floor is concrete. Over this has been laid linoleum. The bathrooms are tiled.
4. Wall and Ceiling finish: The original wall finishing was plaster over structural tile. In many cases, this remains visible. Later room partitions are of gypsum board. In the bathrooms is ceramic tiling.

The ceilings were originally painted, but many now have drop acoustical tiling.

5. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: There are some original door openings visible throughout the building. These are wood paneled doors with nine glass lights and a three-light transom. These doors have a wood frame. Many of the doors have been replaced with modern metal doors.
  - b. Windows: The original wood-framed windows will be replaced with aluminum framed windows.
6. Decorative features and trim: None of note.
7. Hardware: The hardware is modern.
8. Mechanical equipment: The original building was heated by a boiler located on the first floor of the central pavilion on the east side of the structure. Heat was transmitted through metal radiators. Cooling is done by individual window units.
9. Original furnishings: None.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: This structure is bounded on all four sides by roads. To the east of it in between its wings is a parking lot. Across the street to the southeast is Building #400 and across the street to the northwest is Building #555.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Maps and architectural drawings:

The following blueprints dated 1938 are available from Facilities Engineering, New York Support Center, Governors Island, New York, New York:

General

- Front elevations
- Rear elevations
- First floor plans
- Second floor plans
- Third floor plans

Details

- First floor wall plan and sections
- Framing for the second and third floors
- Framing for attic
- Roof plan and details
- Framing for roof
- Entrance details
- Walls and details
- Miscellaneous details
- Stair details
- Toilet and shower room details
- Kitchen details
- Plumbing on first floor
- Plumbing details
- First floor heating plans
- Column schedule and details
- Beam schedules (2 prints)
- Pile footings
- Footing plans
- Plot plan
- Oil storage

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Army Real Property Records, set used by Facilities Engineering, New York Support Center, Governors Island, New York, New York.

New York Times, January 15, 1928, Section IX, p.4, col.5.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Boggs, Major Kenneth L. The Sentinel Isle: A Brief History of Governors Island Fort Jay, 1637-1950, Governors Island, New York.

Ray, Max A. The History of the First United States Army from 1918 to 1980. Fort Meade, Md.: First United States Army, Field Printing Plant, 1980.

U.S. Army. The Story of Governors Island, New York, New York, 1957.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) at the request of the United States Coast Guard, Third Coast Guard District, Governors Island, New York, who funded the project. It is an addition to work accomplished during the summers of 1982 and 1983. This entailed an historic structures inventory, a National Historic Landmark District nomination and documentation of five properties which was completed in 1984. A three-volume report and inventory cards containing the results of the historic structures inventory were transmitted to the Library of Congress as field records under HABS No. NY-5715. The National Historic Landmark District nomination was submitted and acted upon favorably by the National Park System Advisory Board in October of 1984. This project is to document a select list of structures including the New York Arsenal.

Sally Kress Tompkins, Deputy Chief of HABS/HAER, was project manager. Jet Lowe, HAER staff photographer, completed the large format photography. Jay Silberman, Environmental Specialist, District Planning Office, Third Coast Guard District, Governors Island, served as manager and coordinator of the project for the U.S. Coast Guard. Katherine Grandine was project historian.